

Rep. Doris Matsui Secures Key Priorities in Landmark Health Care Legislation

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CONTACT: Alexis Marks or Mara Lee

(202) 225-7163

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Champions Preventive Health Care Efforts and Restoring America's Public Health Workforce

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Doris Matsui (CA-05) greeted today's release of the first draft of the health care legislation to be considered by the House Energy and Commerce Committee on which she serves, the Ways and Means Committee, and the Education and Labor Committee, by celebrating the inclusion of critical public health and prevention priorities she has continued to champion in Congress.

"I am pleased that today's draft of the comprehensive health care reform bill to be considered in Congress incorporates key initiatives I have fought for — initiatives that will restore the vitality of our public health workforce and to increase our focus on preventive health care services," said Rep. Matsui. "The inclusion of significant portions of my Public Health Workforce Investment Act, H.R. 2810, and the Wellness Trust Act, H.R. 1940, in this legislation is indicative of the historic commitment made by this Congress to repair our public and preventive health system. Investing in preventive health care is vital to helping Americans access the care they need to stay healthy, reduce their health care costs and ease the burden on our over-crowded emergency rooms."

This landmark health care reform act takes major steps to fix the health care system for millions of Americans who are either uninsured or struggling to afford skyrocketing health care costs. Section 2231 of the draft incorporates Matsui's legislation, H.R. 2810, addressing the growing crisis in public health by creating a Public Health Workforce Corps that provides up to \$50 million a year in scholarships and loan repayments for graduates of public health schools and programs.

According to the Association of Schools of Public Health, 250,000 more public health workers will be needed by 2020, and there are 50,000 fewer public health workers now than there were in 1980. Section 2231 will help solve this crisis by providing a major new incentive for public health graduates to serve in lower-paying—but extremely critical—positions in state and local public health departments and community health centers.

“The public health workforce is responsible for some of the most important tasks protecting the lives of Americans. This vital cache of workers helps keep California—and states across the nation—safe and secure,” said Representative Matsui. “After recent public health emergencies, from the H1N1 virus to avian flu, we are keenly aware of the need to be vigilant in our efforts to prepare for potential emergencies. A strong and effective public health workforce protects our country from future infectious outbreaks, and ensures that we are prepared to respond to recurring public health challenges. Public health departments and community health centers are critical components of our health care system, and they desperately need the workforce that will be created by Section 2231 of this important legislation.”

Another of Rep. Matsui’s priorities is incorporated into Title 31, creating a new Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund, like the one she proposed earlier this session. While 78 percent of the health care dollars in the United States are spent on chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension, only 3 percent of health spending in the country is focused on proven interventions to prevent these diseases from occurring in the first place.

Title 31 would reverse this imbalance by creating a dedicated Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund to finance proven and community-based preventive health care services for all Americans. The Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund ensures that Congresswoman Matsui’s vision of a stronger focus on preventive health services is incorporated into every American’s health care routine.

“By prioritizing the kinds of clinical and community-based preventive services that are proven to keep people healthier over the long term, prevent chronic disease, and emphasizing wellness, the Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund can make our health care system more effective for patients, more efficient for providers, and more affordable for the American taxpayer,” stated Rep. Matsui.

Next week, beginning on Tuesday, June 23, 2009, Congresswoman Matsui will highlight these and other contributions to health reform during hearings in the House Committee on Energy and Commerce regarding this discussion draft. The schedule to date is as follows:

- The Subcommittee on Health will convene panels at 9:30am. on Tuesday, June 23, 2009;
- The Committee on Energy and Commerce will convene a panel at 9:30am on Wednesday, June 24, 2009; and
- The Subcommittee on Health will convene additional panels at 9:30am on Thursday, June 25, 2009.

“We cannot wait any longer to address our broken health care system—there are too many children to care for, too many seniors without prescriptions, and too many families deciding between paying their mortgage or paying their medical bills for us to wait one more day,” Congresswoman Matsui said. “Today’s introduction of the draft comprehensive health care reform legislation is a historic step in the right direction. As a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, I look forward to being a part of the solution to this economic and moral crisis facing our country.”

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